

バイリンガル言語獲得における「one parent one language」の利点 — 「mixed approach」との比較を通して —

The advantages of the 'one parent one language' approach in comparison with a mixed approach in bilingual language acquisition.

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Introduction

The field of bilingual language acquisition has attracted much popular and scholarly interest for many years. Indeed, perhaps more so than any other branch of linguistics, the personal and the academic interests of researchers are often tightly wound together, with most studies being conducted by linguist parents on their own children. Not just linguists, but many parents living within a bilingual family or community context are very keen to pass on to their children the 'gift' of bilingualism. There are a number of strategies for raising a bilingual child, each with their own advantages and drawbacks. This paper will examine two of the most common approaches for fostering child bilingualism: the 'one parent - one language' approach, and the mixed approach. These are actually best viewed as two ends of the one continuum, rather than as being mutually exclusive. Various studies in a variety of contexts seem to suggest that the closer one gets to the 'one parent - one language' end of the continuum, the more conducive it is for the development of active bilingualism in the child.

1.1 Research into OPOL

The 'one parent - one language' (OPOL) strategy involves a situation where each parent has a different native language. The parent speaks his or her own native language to the child, and one of these languages is the dominant language of the community. (Romaine 1995; 183-4). This approach was first proposed by Maurice Grammont (1902) with the French title *une personne une langue*. He claimed that a child could learn two languages easily with little confusion or mixing, provided that both languages were separated from birth. Grammont, offering some advice to Jules Ronjat on raising a bilingual child, recommended this approach for raising a bilingual child (Ronjat 1913; quoted by Barron-Hauwaert 2002; 106). Ronjat, himself a linguist, implemented this strategy with his son Louis, recording his language development in

German and French until age 4;10. According to Ronjat, Louis mastered both languages and became a balanced bilingual, largely due to the OPOL approach. Since Ronjat's research, authoritative studies have been done by Leopold (1939-49), Dopke (1992), Lanza (1998) and De Houwer (1990; 2007).

Leopold (1939-49) studied the language acquisition of his daughter Hildegard. Leopold himself only spoke German in the home, while his wife only spoke English. When Hildegard was three years old, Leopold reports that she understood both languages as being separate linguistic systems and could code-switch easily according to which parent was being addressed (Leopold 1949b: 14; quoted in Romaine 1995: 190). Hildegard remained an active bilingual for much of her childhood, but by the time she was 15 her German had regressed and she was reluctant to use it.

Dopke (1992) analysed six German/English bilingual families in Australia, and concluded that one of the main factors of successful bilingual language acquisition was strict adherence to the OPOL principle. The two children in her study that had the highest proficiency scores were both raised in OPOL environments. On her website offering support for bilingual families, Dopke (1996) is very clear in her advice to minority language speaking parents:

"In order for the adult to feel comfortable about using the community [minority] language with the child it is best to make a decision to never speak anything but this particular language with the child and to start this as soon as the child is born or from the first time you have contact with a child if she is not your own" (her emphasis).

A study conducted in Norway by Lanza (1998) sheds some interesting light on the question of OPOL versus a mixed approach. Lanza did a case study of two children in Norwegian/English bilingual families, whose parents had made an active decision to raise their children bilingually. Siri's parents adopted the OPOL principle, while Tomas' parents freely engaged in code-mixing and switching between languages. At the conclusion of the investigation, Siri was age 2;7 and an active user of both English and Norwegian, while Tomas had stopped using English at age 2;4 when the dominant language took over, although he remained a passive bilingual. As an interesting post-script to this study, it seems that once the children grew older the success story was reversed. Siri moved with her family to America and became practically monolingual, while Tomas took a trip to the US for a few months and is now actively bilingual (Lanza 1998: 81).

Perhaps the most recent and comprehensive study comes from De Houwer (2007), who gathered data from 1,899 bilingual families living in Flanders, the official Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. The children in all these families were able to actively speak Dutch, but there were considerable differences in their ability to speak the minority language (language X). A variety of different discourse strategies were found in each family, including a mixed approach (which De Houwer terms *Pattern 2a*) and

OPOL (*Pattern 2b*). De Houwer concluded:

"Where both parents spoke language X as well as Dutch (*Pattern 2a*), the children had a four out of five chance of actively speaking language X. When one parent spoke just Dutch, and the other one just language X (*Pattern 2b*), there was a one in four chance that children would fail to speak language X. The differences between *Patterns 2a* and *2b* are not statistically significant" (De Houwer 2007: 419).

According to these findings, when it comes to the success rate of achieving active bilingualism, there is no real advantage of OPOL as compared to a mixed approach. They both yield similar results. This lends support to previous research which also found no real difference between the approaches as regards the cognitive effect on bilingual children (Doyle, Champagne & Segalowitz 1977; Bain & Yu 1980; Barron-Hauwaert 2002). Interestingly, De Houwer found that the two most successful strategies for bilingual acquisition were both parents speaking language X at home (*Pattern 1a*, what Romaine terms *Type 2*), and one parent speaking language X while the other mixes language X and Dutch (*Pattern 1b*). This method is also known as 'minority language at home', or ML@H. "With these input patterns, families had a better than 9 out of 10 chance of raising children who spoke language X." (De Houwer 2007: 419)

1.2 Summary of advantages claimed for OPOL

1.2.1 High success rate

As there are a number of methods of bilingual language acquisition, with none of them guaranteed to work, a high success rate is the most important advantage to consider. Dopke (1988) is very strong in her assertion that OPOL offers a much higher success rate than a mixed approach. She asserts: "While the 'one parent - one language' principle is not a sufficient condition for the simultaneous development of two languages, in families where only one of the parents represents the minority language, it appears to be a necessary condition." (Dopke 1998: 53).

A number of scholars, above mentioned, share Dopke's conviction that the OPOL strategy gives a higher chance of success than a mixed approach (Ronjat 1913; Leopold 1949; Taeschner 1983; Lanza 1998). But this fact has not been conclusively proven, with some studies showing no real difference between the two approaches (Barron-Hauwaert 2002; De Houwer 2007). What we can conclude from all the above studies is that, at the very least, the OPOL approach will not diminish the child's chances of success in bilingual language acquisition, and may in fact boost those chances.

1.2.2 Children have accurate role-models

When each parent speaks their own language, they are modelling native speech forms for their children. Thus their children are exposed to accurate pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and all other aspects of native language. Conversely, when mixing occurs, or when one parent speaks their L2 to their children, then the likelihood of that child learning non-standard speech patterns is greatly increased.

1.2.3 Less confusion and mixing 'errors'

The clear demarkation of languages by parents facilitates the child's ability to distinguish the two language systems. This in turn leads to less confusion and a decrease in mixing 'errors'. In the early stages of development, bilingual children raised in an OPOL environment are able to use their languages differentially and appropriately with their parents and also with strangers. (Genesee & Nicoladis, 2006). Children whose parents often mix languages are still able to distinguish between the two, but it takes them a lot longer to reach this stage.

1.2.4 Development of close parental ties

Aside from linguistic considerations, one great advantage with the OPOL approach is that parents can communicate with their children in their 'heart language'. Emotions and affection are often better expressed in one's L1 than an L2, and can help foster close ties between parent and child. Children may also have more respect for parents who communicate in their native tongue, as a comprehensive study by Teng & Fuligni (2000) shows.

1.3 Criticisms of OPOL

The OPOL approach is not without its critics, and even those who are vocal in its support still admit that it has some drawbacks. Perhaps the main charge to be levelled against OPOL is that the level of bilingual proficiency achieved by children varies considerably. In De Houwer's study, 25.76% of OPOL families had at least one child who could not speak the minority language (De Houwer 2007: 419). In Lanza's study (1998), Siri achieved a very high level of proficiency, actively using both English and Norwegian. Ronjat's son Loius (Ronjat 1913) and Leopold's daughter Hildegard (Leopold 1939-1949) also achieved high proficiency in both languages. Leopold's second daughter, however, only managed to achieve passive bilingualism (Leopold 1949b). Romaine notes that passive bilingualism is a very common outcome of the OPOL method (Romaine 1995: 186).

Takeuchi studied twenty-five Japanese/English bilingual families in Melbourne. In each case, the mother was Japanese and the father Australian, and they both decided to raise their children according to the OPOL principle. She found that: "of the children exposed to Japanese and English through the 'one parent - one language' approach, there were very few who actively spoke Japanese with their Japanese mothers beyond school age. These results are rather disappointing but are consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g. Billings, 1990; Dopke, 1992; Noguchi, 1996; Yamamoto, 1995) and show how difficult it is for a child to develop the ability to speak in the minority language where the input in the minority language is usually limited to one person" (Takeuchi 2006: 328-329).

Reasons for this failure to achieve bilingual language acquisition include the fact that the Japanese input was insufficient when confined to only one parent. Also, half of the mothers gave up on the OPOL approach once their children entered school, as

the emotional strain involved in urging their reluctant children to speak Japanese was just too great (2006: 319, 324).

Perhaps one reason for the different findings is that researchers and parents sometimes differ as to how strictly they define 'one parent - one language'. Dopke favours placing families on a continuum of OPOL, ranging from monolingual (strict OPOL application) to bilingual (flexible OPOL with frequent mixing and switching). An example of a strict OPOL attitude would be "I'm going to speak my own language to my children in any and all circumstances, and demand the same from them". A more flexible OPOL attitude would be "I'll try and mainly use my own language for communication with my children, but won't worry too much about switching occasionally." Parents can be placed anywhere on this continuum, and as Dopke writes: "When comparing this with the degree of competence which the children achieved in the minority language, one cannot help but note that the further towards the bilingual end of the continuum parents' strategies are, the less likely the child is to develop an active command of the minority language." (Dopke 1998: 10).

If we extend Dopke's continuum further past the 'flexible OPOL' point, we would cease to be in a 'one parent - one language' situation and instead find ourselves in a purely mixed approach. This continuum is very useful for defining parental approaches to bilingualism, but Dopke's claim that those children towards the bilingual end are less likely to learn the minority language has not been conclusively proven, as De Houwer (2007) shows.

2.1 The mixed approach

The mixed approach occurs in a family where the parents are bilingual or multilingual, and it is also possible that sectors of the community are bilingual. When addressing the child, parents code-switch and mix languages. This cannot be regarded as a 'strategy' as such, because there is really no deliberate decision to address the child in this fashion, but it usually just occurs in a *laissez-faire* manner.

Compared to the wealth of research into OPOL, there have been much less studies done into the mixed approach. This is despite the fact that multilingual communities are in the majority, and so most bilingual children grow up in societies where mixing and code-switching is commonplace. One reason for this is that most studies by linguists have been conducted on their own children, which puts them in the category of educated and middle-class. Thus the focus is commonly elitist or additive bilingualism, while the mixed approach often occurs in lower economic communities by necessity (Romaine 1995: 186).

As parents usually provide the primary language role models for children, when they engage in frequent mixing and code-switching it naturally follows that their children do the same. Research into the mixing approach has shown this to be the case (Smith 1935; Tabouret-Keller 1962; Burling 1959). Children brought up with this

method engage in frequent lexical, phonological and morphological mixing, and do not become aware of two language systems until much later than OPOL children.

One small recent study of the mixed approach was conducted by Weatherford (2006), who attempted to raise his daughter in Japan bilingually "following a more natural approach in which no rigid restrictions have been placed on language usage in the home." (2006: 210). Both he and his Japanese wife used English and Japanese interchangeably when talking to their daughter Yuki. He found that by age 2, Yuki's language was clearly Japanese dominant, with a much larger vocabulary and a stronger preference for Japanese rather than English.

As suggested by Weatherford, the biggest advantage to the mixed approach is that there is no artificial restriction placed on familial communication. Bilingual speakers often engage in frequent code-switching, depending on a variety of factors, and sometimes with the same interlocutor. The rigid OPOL principle which states "I must only use my native language with my child" can lead to an artificial discourse situation and create a severe strain within the home, as Takeuchi (2006) found. If there is indeed no difference between the success rates of OPOL versus a mixed approach, as some scholars believe, perhaps it is more advantageous for family harmony to abandon strict rules of interaction and instead adopt the more *laissez-faire* attitude of language mixing.

3. Comparison between OPOL and the mixed approach

When considering bilingual language acquisition, the 'one parent - one language' approach has much to commend it, particularly when compared to the mixed approach. However, OPOL by itself is no guarantee of success.

When considering the advantages of both approaches, parents must take into account their family's unique personal and community circumstances. As already mentioned, rather than both approaches being mutually exclusive, they are best regarded as two ends of a continuum. When making a decision on how to bring up their child bilingually, parents need to decide which point on the continuum for which to aim. Those parents with supportive children who speak a prestigious minority language may aim for a strict OPOL strategy, while those parents living in a bilingual society with many bilingual friends and family may allow some code-switching. There may be some slightly more advantages to a strict OPOL policy, but the research is not conclusive. As Baker writes, in his influential guide to bilingualism:

"Keeping languages separate with clear demarcation and boundaries between them will tend to make bilingual development more efficient, more socially acceptable and feed the child's memory and language repertoire in a more appropriate way. However, there are families who mix languages and the child still learns to separate the languages, although sometimes a little later. As one parent remarks, 'Both my husband and I chop and change quite frequently between English and Italian when speaking

directly to each other, as do many other bilingual couples we know ... our children understand English and Italian perfectly. They don't consistently speak one or other language to either myself or their father ... Our children show no signs of being confused.' (*Bilingual Family Newsletter* (1997), Vol 14, No. 2, p.6)." (Baker 2000: 45)

Indeed, there seems to be no reason why one parent couldn't use an OPOL approach and the other a mixed approach. The parent who speaks a minority language could adhere to that language only, while the other parent could speak both the minority and the majority language. De Houwer labels this input pattern 1b, and shows a much higher success rate than both an OPOL or a mixed approach on its own (De Houwer 2007: 419).

Conclusion

When considering the advantages of the 'one parent - one language' approach as compared to a mixed approach, it is very difficult to make any bold assertions. The research to date has failed to reach a consensus regarding the effectiveness of bilingual language acquisition under each method. There are many other variables which influence the success of raising a bilingual child, such as quality of input, discourse strategies, the prestige level of the minority language, treatment of 'errors', use of minority language between parents, and others. All these variables act on the family unit to either promote or discourage bilingual language acquisition, irrespective of the approach used. What all the research has shown, though, is that an OPOL approach is definitely no worse than a mixed approach, and may perhaps be more effective.

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